

Through the generosity of Charles R. Millikan, D. Min., vice president for Spiritual Care and Values Integration, an annual award competition was established at Houston Methodist Hospital among the resident staff. To enter the writing competition, residents must submit a poem or essay of 1,000 words or less on the topic, "On Being a Doctor." A committee of seven was selected from Houston Methodist Hospital Education Institute to establish the judging criteria and select the winning entries. The following is the first-place winning entry for 2017; the second- and third-place entries will be published in the next two issues of this journal.

HEARING IS BELIEVING

JaMís M. Jackson, M.D., M.S., third-year neurology resident

Houston Methodist Hospital, Houston, Texas

I have to admit, I was scared to death before starting my ICU rotation as an intern. I was worried that I would have a difficult time accepting the death of a patient who was partly entrusted to my care. I've had patients pass away before, even as a medical student, and it was tough. But this was going to be different. I had to come to terms with the fact that every patient I would see for the next 4 weeks would be seriously ill, and there was a possibility that, despite the greatest of efforts, many of the patients I saw during that rotation would not get better.

During my first week, after arriving in the ICU for my shift one morning, I was assigned to a patient who had respiratory failure and sepsis. He was intubated and on sedation for days after his admission. Although he couldn't respond to me in any purposeful manner, I still came into his room each day, greeted him with a "good morning," talked to him while I was examining him, and prayed for him. After a week or so, he was able to open his eyes as we gradually reduced his sedation. He could then start following some simple commands. There were a few setbacks, but finally, on the day he was extubated, he was able to speak to us—although in all actuality some of the things he said made no sense, and he was pretty confused after essentially being in a drug-induced coma for several days.

One day, which turned out to be his birthday, he was able to sit up in a chair, and we were happy to see that he was doing better. To my surprise, "better" medically did not equate to "better" emotionally or mentally. He was afraid. He thought that people were trying to hurt him (which was not the case) and believed that something bad was going to happen to him. He asked me to stay

with him, and I did until he was assured that everything was okay. The day finally came when he was well enough to be transferred to a long-term acute care facility. As the transport service wheeled him out of the ICU on a stretcher, I was able to catch him to say goodbye, so thankful that he was leaving the ICU alive and in better health than when he arrived.

In the following months, I often wondered about my patient and what happened to him after he left. It was almost a year after we last saw one another, and I was walking down the hospital hallway. I couldn't believe it! There he was, with a cane in his hand, walking right towards me. He gave me a big hug and said that he had returned to the ICU looking for me. I told him that I had been thinking about him too and was praying that all turned out well with him. He said "thank you," but what was so amazing was that he had heard me when I came into his room in the mornings and talked to him. Even though he couldn't respond, he at least knew that I was there doing what I could to help him.

For me, the best part of being a doctor is connecting with my patients. They're the reason why I went into this profession. The moments when I can spend time with a patient on a human level, seeing them as more than a number or a case—as a dad, a sister, a pastor, or even another physician—are what gives this job meaning for me. Not all of the patients I've helped take care of have survived, and there have been moments where my heart has been broken for their loss. Yet I still treasure every second, and I've hopefully had some positive impact on their lives, no matter how small—because my patients have done the same for me, and my life is the better for it.